Adolescence is a Period of Enormous Developmental Change...

Compared to adults, adolescents are more impulsive, more influenced by peers, and more oriented towards short-term gains than long-term costs. As a result, many adolescents engage in risk-taking behaviours, and may even commit crimes, such as fighting, vandalism, and shoplifting. In fact, adolescents are more likely than any other age group to be arrested.

Most people have done something risky, unwise, or illegal when they were an adolescent.

What is a Youth's Risk for Offending?

The first step to preventing crime is understanding a youth’s risks and needs.

If an adolescent commits a crime, will he or she become entrenched in a life of offending? Or, will he desist with age and increasing maturity? Judges, psychiatrists, psychologists, probation officers, and others must make these assessments every day. Their judgments influence whether a youth is incarcerated or released, and what services, if any, he or she receives.

Wrong decisions are costly. If an adolescent is inaccurately judged to be a high risk, they may be unnecessarily incarcerated, therefore decreasing their chances at becoming a law-abiding citizen. Conversely, if an adolescent is inaccurately judged to be a low risk, it may jeopardize public safety. As such, professionals have an obligation to make the best possible decisions.

What are the Best Approaches by Which to Assess Risk?

One approach for assessing risk is to rely on one’s own expertise and clinical intuition. However, these unstructured judgments are unreliable and often invalid.¹ For instance, one review concluded that clinicians were accurate in only one of three cases.²

A better approach is to use a structured risk assessment tool that compiles an empirically-supported set of risk and protective factors for reoffending.

Although these tools cannot foresee the future, they are more transparent, reliable, and accurate than the alternative, clinical intuition. They also help agencies better allocate resources so that youth with the highest needs get the services that they require.

**Our Work**

Our research focuses on identifying the best possible tools and methods by which to assess risk for violence and offending.

We started this research because of requests from agencies and professionals for guidance and information. From our own work in clinical and justice settings, we recognize that risk assessments are often challenging and stressful.

Our research spans from basic-level science on risk and protective factors all the way to local, provincial, and implementation projects, in which we work with agencies to implement evidence-based practices.

**Some Areas of Focus**

Our projects are tailored to the needs of our agency partners, and the interests of trainees in our lab. Some examples of areas of focus are:

**Risk Management and Treatment:** The goal in not solely to predict risk but to prevent violence. Thus, how can tools help plan treatment and ultimately, reduce offending?

**Change:** Some adolescents briefly experiment with offending; others become ensnared in crime. What determines which path an adolescent takes? What acts as a turning point?

**Gender, Culture, and Diversity:** Do tools work for girls, or youth from minority groups? How can we attend to diversity, and develop gender- and culturally-tailored approaches?

**Strengths:** Young offenders have important strengths that have helped them to survive experiences such as abuse. Does assessing strengths lead to better treatments?

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Examples of Recent Publications and Presentations

**Book Chapters**


**Research Articles**


**Tools & Guides**


**Conferences & Workshops**


